



HOW LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES CAN HELP SCHOOLS ENHANCE SECURITY

More than 100 people were killed or injured in school shootings in the U.S. in 2018, the worst year on record for gun violence in schools. The Washington Post reports that nearly a quarter-million students have experienced gun violence at school since the Columbine High School shootings in 1999.

Clearly, campus safety is a critical issue across the country, but law enforcement is too often relegated to a reactive role. So how can local police agencies engage with schools in their jurisdictions to help increase safety and thwart would-be shooters?

John Gooley is a former Pennsylvania police officer who is now director of school security programs for Cardinal Point Homeland Security Group. In this expert opinion piece, he answers common questions about campus safety challenges, best practices for School Resource Officers (SRO) and technology that can help keep weapons out of schools.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE GREATEST CHALLENGES TO SCHOOL SAFETY TODAY?

The biggest challenge is the fact that we have to do something about young people on the pathway to violence. Students don't just wake up one day and decide they're going to become an active shooter. We have to try to stop the violence very early on before someone actually draws a gun, because it's very hard to stop them at that

point. We know it's about two seconds from the moment that a student decides to pull a weapon until the first round is discharged. Even if you have school-based law enforcement on site at the time, it's generally too late.

One of the problems we have is that a lot of different groups operate in schools – law enforcement is there, mental health, human resources – but I think they all speak different languages, and a lot of times they don't speak to each other. Because the silos are not communicating with each other, individuals are able to walk between the silos, and that's why we have some of these incidents occurring. It's a lack of communication.

The other issue I see is student anxiety. Social media, something that was originally designed to connect us all, really seems to be isolating students, and I think the isolation leads to bullying and harassment, both in and out of school. In the past, we may have seen bullying occurring in a school, but now students are exposed to it 24 hours a day.

WHAT CAN LOCAL POLICE DO TO HELP IMPROVE SCHOOL SAFETY?

The most important thing is to form strong partnerships with their schools. Collaboration is so important. We don't want the police operating in a vacuum. We want them collaborating in the schools, being part of the school communities.

It's so important for police officers to maintain positive dialogue as it pertains to safety planning, live action

training and drills in schools. It gives the school an opportunity to train and local law enforcement tremendous opportunities to get into the schools, see what the buildings are like and train their officers.

For example, we're currently working with one of our school districts on an active shooter exercise. It's a full-scale event where the local police are going to come into the school. One of the officers will be dressed as a bad guy, and it gives that school an opportunity to train in a realistic-type scenario. In this school they teach run-hide-fight, so the teachers are going to practice all of those different skills and scenarios in a controlled environment. Generally the students are going to look to the teachers for direction in a serious situation, so it's very important for the teachers to practice the skills.

OTHER THAN TRAINING, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BEST PRACTICES YOU RECOMMEND FOR CAMPUS SAFETY, BOTH FOR THE SCHOOLS AND FOR LOCAL POLICE?

Community policing is an age-old concept, but I think it needs to really be brought back into schools, and that means having the officers come into the schools and relate to the students on a very personal basis. Barriers get broken down when they're able to do that, and it's really important to not have the police seen as adversaries.

Another thing the police can do as a best practice is to set standards for safety in schools. In Pennsylvania, a unit of state troopers go out and does risk and vulnerability assessments, looking for things such as access control and camera placement. They make recommendations based on standards for schools

Again, it gives the troopers or the local police the opportunity to go out and become familiar with the schools that are in their jurisdictions and help schools improve their security. Maintaining that close collaboration with both the school districts and the students is very important.

LET'S TALK ABOUT SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS. WHAT'S THE ROLE OF THOSE OFFICERS TODAY? HOW HAS IT EVOLVED IN THE PAST DECADE? HOW DO YOU SEE IT CHANGING IN THE FUTURE?

School police and SROs are there to provide a safe and secure learning environment and to protect the students and staff from violence. That is really the most important thing. They're educators, they're informal counselors, and they're also law enforcement officers when they're in the schools.

How it's changing is our school-based police officers are moving in a direction more toward prevention than reaction. Typically in law enforcement we're responding after something has happened, and in schools we have to utilize more prevention methods. We have to get out in front of aggressive behavior before it becomes a problem. We also have to be able to respond to threats that we're

seeing on social media, and the officers need to know how to investigate those.

Let's get to the students early on, even in early ages of grammar school, when we see how students are interacting with each other and there can be some early indicators of violence that we can address before they become a problem. I think that's a really important concept that is going to be the future for school-based law enforcement – getting involved before aggression escalates into a problem.

I also think we really need to look at specific training competencies for school-based law enforcement. Officers that are out on the street don't receive a lot of training with dealing child and adolescent development, so our school-based police officers really have to train in those areas to be aware of the specific needs of children and adolescents, and to know how to effectively communicate with them, their parents and the school staff as well.

They also need training for dealing with students of color, students who have disabilities, homeless students or LGBTQ students, all of whom we encounter frequently in our schools today. They have very specific needs that officers have to be able to deal with. Training has to emphasize cultural competence and how we can disrupt racial bias.



WHAT ABOUT TECHNOLOGIES LIKE X-RAY DETECTION? HOW CAN SCHOOLS MAKE USE OF THOSE

I'm a big believer in the human presence and having the officers in the schools, but they can't be everywhere, and there are some great evolving technologies, such as artificial intelligence in cameras, that can tip off an officer that there might be a problem. I think that's going to be an important part of school-based policing in the future.

X-ray scanners are being used very effectively in New York City in a large number of schools. They use the Hi-SCAN

X-ray inspection system for random checkpoint searches, depending on what is going on at the time at a school. A lot of weapons have been found on students before they actually get into the school, and that really is the key. It's a very effective screening process for making sure that weapons don't get into schools.

Artificial intelligence is another evolving technology that will help us in schools. That's a great technology that's going to help our school-based law enforcement to have an extra set of eyes and ears.

WHAT ARE YOUR FINAL THOUGHTS ON LOCAL POLICE AND SCHOOL SAFETY?

Everything goes back to prevention. We want to assess those behaviors very early on and then take action, whether it's through the use of interviews or through the use of technology to prevent the incident from escalating and students progressing up that pathway to violence. Technology can be a great asset in that respect.

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